

Friis, John

From: Cohen [cohen1232@comcast.net]
Sent: Sunday, March 22, 2009 3:06 PM
To: Friis, John
Subject: Testimony

March 22, 2009

Re: Raised S.B. No. 1142, Session Year 2009

Dear Sen. Gaffey, Rep. Fleischmann, and the Education Committee members,

Please accept this letter as testimony for my **opposition** to S.B. No. 1142:

I am adamantly opposed to this bill, especially the following two added components:

- *to establish that the burden of proof lies with the party requesting a special education hearing*
- *to provide that a local or regional board of education's commitment to provide special education to a child terminates upon the child's twenty-first birthday*

As it stands now, it can be difficult for families to receive appropriate programs for their children with special needs, especially when those needs are significant. Parents often have a difficult time obtaining the information they need to prove that a program is not effective. Parents are aware that programs are not effective because their children are not learning, but the actual testing data or schoolwork data is often kept by the school system. It is already an emotional hardship for families going through due process with their school systems. Shifting the burden of proof from the schools to the families, allows for an abuse of power that is simply scary. It makes it particularly difficult for a parent who may not be educated in the specific laws of special education.

As for the second issue, most transition plans happen during the year that a child will be turning twenty-one. Changing the date that a child's special education program is terminated to their actual twenty-first birthday makes this planning almost impossible. It is also incredibly disruptive to the lives of children with severe disabilities whose lives become quite abruptly turned upside down when they are no longer receiving educational services. This is a very vulnerable and needy population, and the school component is essential for them, not only on an educational level but in terms of a personal comfort level. These are students with severe disabilities who count on consistency and schedules, and abruptly throwing them out of the educational system is confusing to them. At this time, adult services are difficult to find, let alone receive, and to simply cut off a family from a support system that they have relied on for years – especially the most challenged of our citizens – is not only unethical but cruel.

Thank you for your sincere consideration.

Donna Cohen

3/23/2009

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